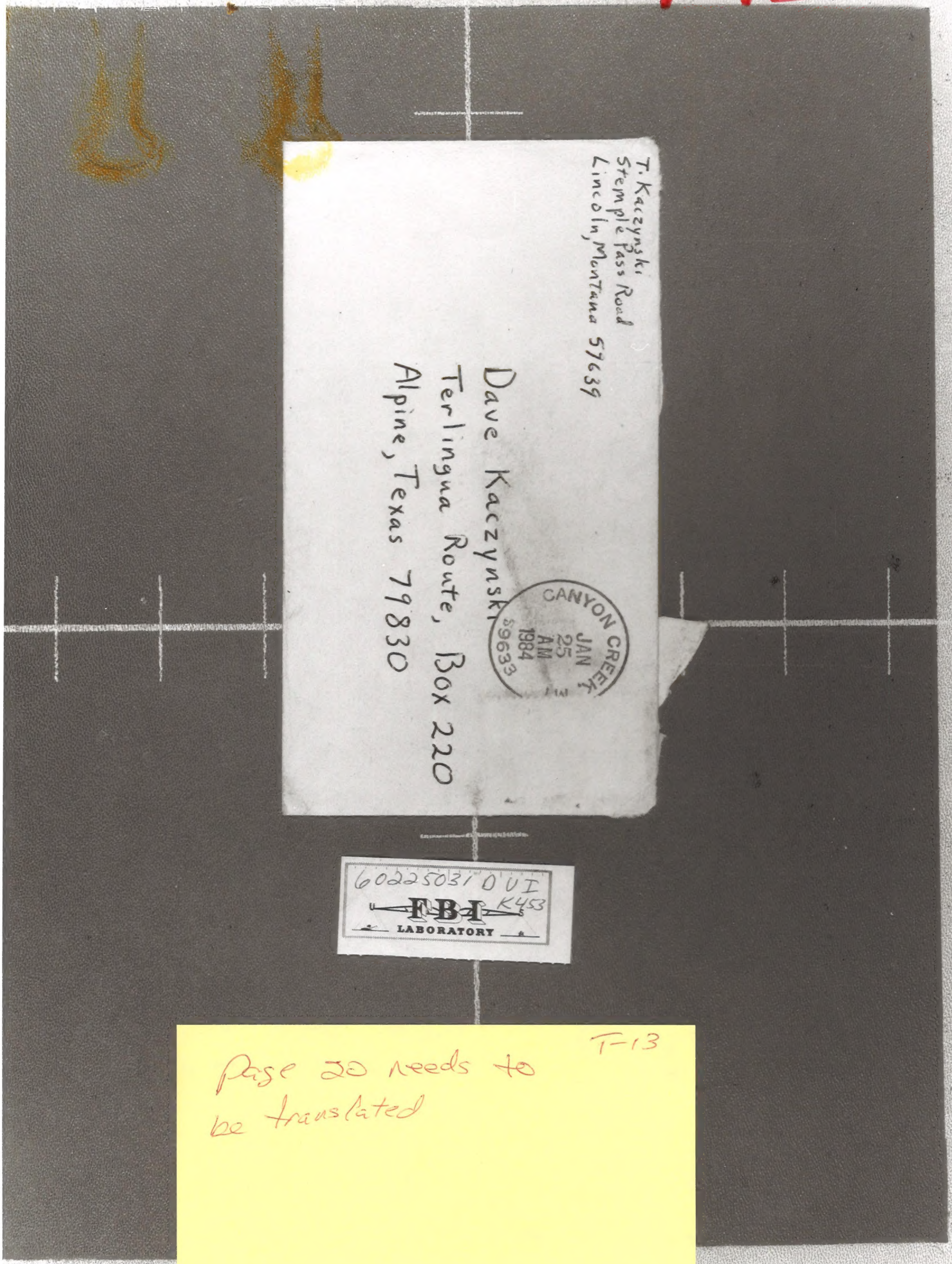
T-13



T-13

Page 20 needs to be translated

Dear Dave —

I didn't mean to chide you for not building a cabin, and I wasn't trying to advise you to build one, either. The point I wanted to make was simply that you were being unfair to yourself when you referred to "the off-chance that I might succeed" in building a cabin. I don't doubt that you could build a good cabin — or as good a one as you might feel was worthwhile — if you once got started on the project.

What does "velleity" mean? That's a word I haven't run into before.

I appreciate most of your reasons for not wanting to build a cabin; particularly — "the lure of indoor comfort would tend to distance me from appreciation of the elements". Very true. Of course, around here it's worthwhile to have a cabin anyway, because of the winter conditions. I do not feel too keenly the disadvantages of being distanced from the

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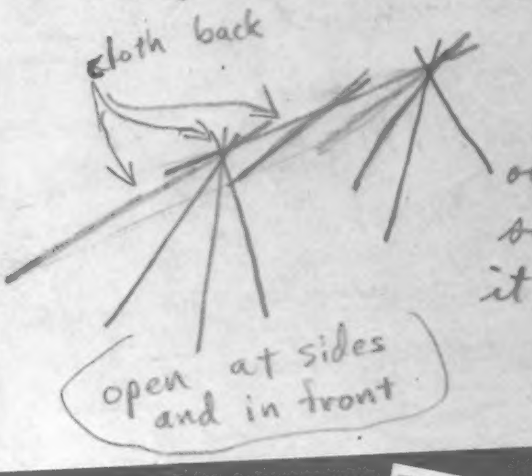
appreciation of thirty degrees below zero.

I don't think you'd need to worry about dying from exposure with no cabin and no car on a bad night, provided you're prepared for it. As you know, I have plenty of experience camping out with miles of rough country between me and any shelter in a climate where snow or heavy, ice-cold rains can be expected any time, and it's not hard to keep yourself comfortable provided you know what to do and provided you're prepared. I'll describe the system I use, but I hasten to add that what works well in this country might not work so well under your conditions down there, so you'd have to figure out your own variations and learn by experience.



Well, this damn drawing is coming out incomprehensible, so I'll just describe it in words.

I cut some light

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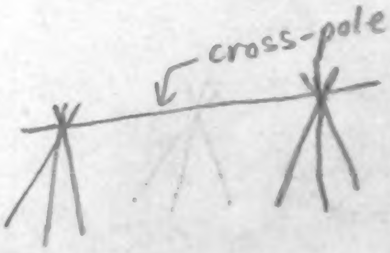
poles and tie them together at the top to make 2 tripods. I run a pole across between the 2 tripods, thus:



(or instead of tripods, I tie the ends of the crosspole to trees, according as the latter are available). Then I lean three or 5 poles against the crosspole so that they make about a 45° angle with the ground. I stretch a cloth (water-repellant) over this framework, and tie it in place, and there is my shelter. About 3 feet in front of this shelter — more or less, according to the size of fire I want to make — I build a good fire. This setup is very cozy, and you can keep warm and dry in almost any weather as long as you have plenty of firewood. I've never known a rain heavy enough to put out a big fire, if you're burning fair-sized logs.

In cold weather, or if wind is a problem, set up a wall of logs or rocks

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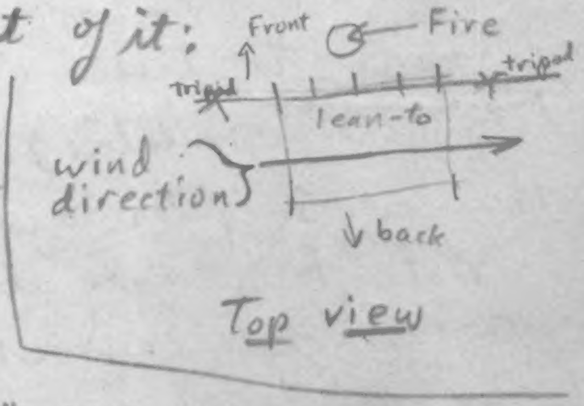
2 or 3 feet behind the fire. This reflects the heat back at you and helps prevent the smoke from being blown into your lean-to. In any case, you have least trouble with smoke blowing into your lean-to if you can set it so that the wind blows across the front of it:



I learned this system from books and modified the details to suit myself.

Of course, there would be some problems in your area. Around here one camps where one is sheltered by trees and usually by the hills also. In your place, open and flat I assume the wind gets a great deal stronger and you'd have to devise a much sturdier set-up for supporting your lean-to. Poles may not be available anyway. Fire fuel may be scarce and might come in small pieces so that the fire might be put out by rain, and anyway you wouldn't be able to sleep for the necessity of

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constantly feeding the fire. Still, you might be able to arrange something along these lines. Two points to remember: (1) get a big pile of firewood ready before dark. (2) Don't try to close in the sides of the lean-to, unless with barriers only a couple of feet high, otherwise smoke will probably collect in the lean-to. You need free circulation of air if you don't want to get smoked out.

Other ideas: If you can get hold of some wood, put a platform say a foot high in the bottom of your hole and set up your tent on that. A 12" rain presumably will put only 12" of water* into your hole if you have things set up so that no water drains into the hole from outside. So you can keep dry, which is the main thing.

If there are plenty of rocks available, you could build yourself a small rock hut. If very small and crude, I don't think it would interfere

*Actually more, because of the sloping sides of the hole.

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with your appreciation of the elements. But it takes a lot of rocks — more than you might think. Also, this suggestion is based on the assumption that your area is not prone to earthquakes. You'll probably prefer not to stick the rocks together with concrete, since that would mean a lot more work. But you'd want to stick the rocks together with concrete when you build the chimney, else smoke will come through the holes. I think it would be best to use concrete (portland cement + sand) in building a chimney, and not mortar mix — also, don't buy ready-mixed concrete but buy the cement and sand (if you have to buy the latter) separately. I think they use about one part portland cement to about 5 parts sand and gravel. For a stove you could use any sort of an old steel container and get a welder to cut suitable holes in it for you, but you might have to do some monkeying around with it before you can get the smoke to all go up the chimney and not out the door of the stove.

OR:

Horace Kephart's "Book of Camping and woodcraft" — not

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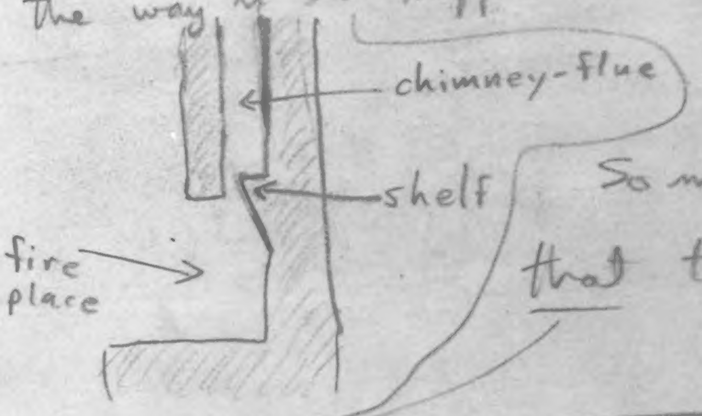
a modern work, an old-time classic, but probably still available, has all kinds of useful suggestions and information (though not always to be accepted as gospel truth), and it might be worth your while to get the book. He gives the following diagram, of a properly-built fireplace, and says that the the shelf shown in the chimney is important in getting the smoke to go the way it is supposed to go, i.e <u>up</u>.



So much for <u>that</u> topic.

No, one more thing, about your aversion to having to <u>plan</u> a cabin. I don't think too much planning would be needed for a rock hut. You could just start piling up rocks and let the thing grow like topsy. Even the chimney probably doesn't need much planning, because if it won't draw the smoke at first you can just keep monkeying around and modifying it

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until it does draw — as long as you (8)
have plenty of ventilation in there so as to
have no carbon monoxide worries.

You ought to do some exploring in Mexico while you still have a car. I bet you would find it very fulfilling; besides, you could write me about your experiences so that I could enjoy them vicariously.

You remark: "... a habit of urban time-consciousness, which ... keeps us looking toward the future — toward the week-end, the yearly vacation, and retirement — in order to justify the present, which is not intrinsically satisfying ...".

Again your observations agree with my own, which tends to support my opinion that my experiences with the psychology of wilderness life are not peculiar to myself. Quite true — in urban life satisfaction is generally way off in the future, and when we finally gain our object, we seldom get enough satisfaction to justify the long wait. In the wilderness life, frequently one is satisfied now, or at worst, satisfaction is only as far off as the next meal. I suspect all this has something to do with the modern obsession with physical security and longevity. When you're unfulfilled, and fulfillment — or the mirage of it — is way

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off there in the indefinite future, naturally you're afraid of dying before you get it. But when now is good — as I have often experienced in the woods — it is surprisingly easy to shrug your shoulders at the idea that you might die next year or next month, or even perhaps next week. Some (not necessarily all*) primitive peoples have shockingly short life-expectancies, but, as far as I can make out from what I've read about them, they just don't worry about it. Contrary to what civilized people believe, when you're living from hand to mouth is exactly when you DON'T feel insecure about the future.

I haven't had anything that corresponds to your experience of having people more vividly

*According to one book I read, 8% of the Kalahari Bushmen are 60 years old or over. According to 1970 census, 10% of U.S. population was 65 or older. Not all that big a difference.

(11)

even though under modern circumstances it's likely to end up painfully as you have to watch the country being ruined. Somebody or other once said, "It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." I don't know that I would apply this to the love of women (which is what the quotation refers to), but I would certainly apply it to the love of country. (Obviously I don't mean patriotism, but the love of physical country, i.e. terrain.)

As for that ninny who tries to use you as a substitute for a radio, fortunately I'm better off in that regard. Some of the people around here certainly have their faults, but I'll have to give them credit for this: They are perceptive enough to recognize my preference for solitude, and considerate enough

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"present" across the distance (11)
that solitude makes. I guess
you're more interested in people
than I am.

I thoroughly appreciate
and sympathize with your
feelings about the desecration of
your pond. Needless to say,
I've had all too many
experiences of the same
character myself. Eventually it
gets so that one almost has
an aversion to going out in
the woods for fear one will
run into some new horror—
another wild place logged off,
motorcycle tracks in some
solitude that one had previously
thought was inaccessible to
motorcycles, etc, etc. I
imagine you'll probably have
more disagreeable experiences
in the future with desecration
of the wild country. All I
can say is that knowing nature
at first hand is well worth it,

to respect that preference. (12)
I've rarely had anyone bother
me with a visit unless it
was for a good reason.

As for your question—
my root cellar currently has
something over 2 feet of
earth cover on it, and this
seems adequate, especially with
the snow as additional insulation.
Temperature inside never seems
to get below 35°—generally it's
36° or 37°, in winter.

As for your disappointing
experience with buffalo gourd,
you can expect many such
disappointments in using Kirk's
book. He seems to interpret
the concept of edibility in the
broadest possible sense. On
the other hand, many wild
plants really are good, especially
once you get accustomed to
them and learn how to use
them.

Delighted to hear of your
discovery of the spring. By
digging it out a little and
letting it clear itself, you can

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[illegible] to [illegible] information (15)
may not be 100% reliable. The behavior of rabid animals is erratic and unpredictable. The disease attacks the brain, which apparently accounts for their disorganized behavior. They sometimes do attack or chase people or animals. This is called the "furious stage" of rabies. Predatory animals such as cats, dogs, coyotes, etc. are more likely to exhibit the "furious" symptoms than are pacific animals like horses, cows, etc. You asked whether they would make a "serious attempt" to get into your burrow. My guess is that they would not, if by "serious" you mean persistent. Since they are disorganized and frantic, I imagine that if frustrated in their first attempt to get into your burrow they would just run off somewhere else and bite a cactus or something. But this is only a guess. Any mammal exhibiting behavior that appears distinctly abnormal should be considered a possible rabies case. For instance, a rabid animal may appear abnormally tame. If such an animal is approached, it may bite. Again, a common symptom of rabies is partial paralysis, so that for instance a coyote or dog dragging its hind legs should be avoided. I wouldn't recommend trying to help any sick

probably get clean water. (13)
But think twice about drinking it unboiled. I've learned that coyote feces are full of the eggs of a potentially dangerous parasite. I don't drink water unboiled unless it's coming out of a nice clean hole in a dry hillside so that there's no "upstream" whatsoever.

Glad you liked the present

Until 2 years ago the coldest temperature I ever had at the cabin was about 21° or 22° below zero, though I know there were colder temperatures nearby — for instance, one winter when I had 18 or 20 below, Kenny Lee had 35° below. I guess my cabin is in somewhat of a warm spot.

But 2 years ago there was one day (in an otherwise mild winter) when I had something like 31° below. I'm told that on that day it was 55° below at Lincoln. Last winter was very

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mild, but this winter we had a particularly cold spell in December. One day at dawn I had 24° below, another day $31\frac{1}{2}$° below, and another day 33° below — the coldest ever. They say it got down to nearly 60° below at Lincoln. For about 8 days the temperature at the cabin never got up to zero, except one afternoon when it got to 5 above, or thereabouts, if my memory serves. Then a few days later it got so warm that most of the snow melted off in a short time.

By the way, as to getting water when you don't have a car, I'll remind you about the possibility of a setup to collect rainwater.

You asked about rabid animals. I'll tell you what I know about them, but bear in mind that this consists of things I've read here and there over a period of many years, and my memory is not perfect,

(15)

...mal. It may be rabid, and just handling it could be risky if you have any recent scratches or anything on your skin. As far as I know, the biggest rabies risks are bats, and above all, skunks. A bat flying around in broad daylight may be rabid — they sometimes attack and bite people. Personally I wouldn't touch a skunk, dead or alive, with a ten-foot pole, or even an eleven-foot pole. They have a terrible reputation for rabies. I understand most pet shops will no longer handle skunks because there is so much trouble with them turning rabid. Deep and severe bites from rabid animals are more dangerous than slight bites, and bites in parts of the body near the head are more dangerous than bites far from the head. The disease works its way along the nerves to the brain; the farther it has to go, the longer time you have to get the series of shots finished before the infection reaches the brain and symptoms develop — once symptoms develop, you're done for.

On the bright side: if you gets bitten by a rabid animal, it doesn't necessarily mean you will get rabies, even if you don't get the shots. Estimates

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of the risk of getting rabies from an untreated (17)
bite of a known rabid animal vary from 10% probability of getting the disease to 50% probability of getting it. Apparently the risk varies with species of animal and other conditions. Risk of getting the disease can be reduced by disinfecting the bite. The more extreme and painful method is to cauterize the bite with a red-hot nail or other hot object. One thing I wonder about with this cauterization idea is — in case of a deep wound, if a nerve by chance runs close to the wound, is there a risk of killing the nerve and causing paralysis with the hot iron? Alternative is chemical disinfection. Recommended for rabies bites is benzalkonium chloride. This is available in pharmacies under the trade-name "Zephiran". The solution commonly sold is much weaker than what is recommended for rabies bites. So buy Zephiran Concentrate. This is then to be diluted with water to a 1:100 (i.e., one percent) solution for use on rabies bites. Instructions are (or were, 10 years ago) included in the package. Even if you are going to get the shots, the wound should be dis-infected, since the shots don't always prevent the disease. Needless to say, you'd want to get the shots except in the unlikely event

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that you were so isolated that it would (18)
take months to get to a doctor. (In rare
cases, the disease may develop as long as a
year after the bite.) I recently read that a
new type of rabies vaccine has been developed.
Fewer shots are required than with the old
vaccine, and the shots are less painful and
expensive. Also, I am not sure, but I think
the article also said that the new vaccine is
more certain to prevent the disease, and also
is safer than the old vaccine — the old
vaccine sometimes causes paralysis, though
this is rare — very rare, if my memory serves.

Well, it looks like I'm not going to
get down there to visit you this year.
I take it you're going
back to Lombard in
March. When convenient, let
me know what your
plans are for next year
and maybe I'll get down
there to see you then.

Meanwhile, do me a
favor and go down
and take a look at Mexico.
I feel confident that you'll
find it worthwhile to

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do so, and I know I'll enjoy reading about your experiences when you write me about them so I can appreciate them vicariously. (19)

I think that idea you mentioned about renting a room in Ojinaga for a while is a very good one. I imagine you'd pick up some Spanish pretty quickly then. By the way, if you want to get back to studying the language, I'll send you my Spanish grammar and my book of Quiroga stories under these conditions: (1) I want them back after a few months; (2) you must make every effort not to damage or dirty them. On the other hand, I'll solemnly promise not to complain even if I get them back in worse condition than they already are — that way you won't have to worry that I'll get mad if you have some accident with the books. Of course, some deterioration with use is inevitable anyway — the grammar book is so old that the pages tear easily, and the Quiroga book is poorly bound, so that the binding is falling apart.

Let me know whether you want me to

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send the books. The grammar book I found quite clear and easy to learn from. I'm sure you could easily work through it in 3 months or so with no strain. (20)

Los hombres no tienen el derecho de quejarse de que sean naturalmente débiles y de vidas cortas, ni de que sea la casualidad y no el mérito lo que determina su destino. Al contrario, la reflexión enseñará que nada excede ni sobrepasa al poder que la naturaleza ha otorgado al hombre, y lo que les falta es más bien la energía que la fortaleza o largor de vida. Lo que guía y domina la vida humana es el alma del hombre. Si persigue la gloria por el camino de la virtud, tiene todos los recursos y habilidades que necesita para ganar la fama, y está independiente de la fortuna, la cual ni puede dar a un hombre la honradez, la energía, y otras buenas cualidades, ni quitárselas. Pero si el alma es el esclavo de deseos viles y se hunde en la corrupción de la pereza y de los placeres carnales, goza de un desenfreno dañoso durante una temporada breve; luego cuando el ocio ha desgastado la fortaleza, la juventud, y la inteligencia, se enculpa la debilidad de nuestra naturaleza, y cada hombre pretende disculpar sus propios defectos imputando su fracaso a circunstancias adversas. Si los hombres persiguiesen lo bueno con tanto ardor como el con que buscan lo poco edificante y lo poco provechoso — y a muchas veces lo peligroso y lo dañoso — dominerían a los acontecimientos en vez de ser dominados por ellos, y se alzarían a tales alturas de la grandeza y la gloria, que su mortalidad se vestiría de la inmortalidad. — Salustio, La guerra de Jugurtha. Por supuesto, no convengo con todo lo anterior, pero sin embargo el pasaje tiene cierto encanto, y es característico de los antiguos romanos.

— Ted

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P.S. I forgot to add: Don't let any worries about rabid animals spoil your enjoyment of the desert. According to the most recent estimate that I've read, only about one person a year in the U.S. dies of rabies. The chances are that you'll never have an encounter with a rabid animal. There's supposed to be a problem with rabies in bats in Western Montana, and I've never yet seen a bat exhibit abnormal behavior such as might suggest rabies, though its quite common to see bats

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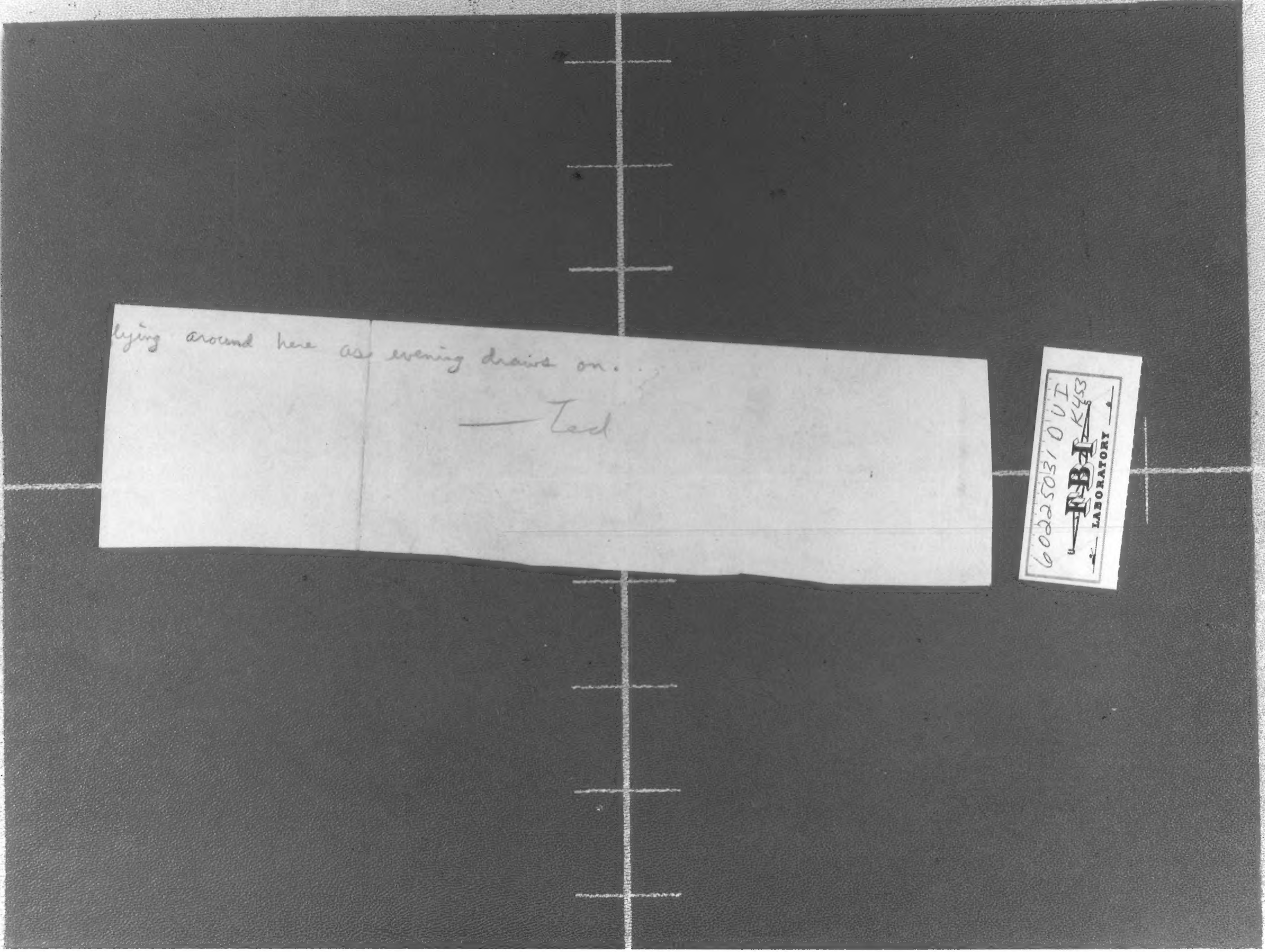
lying around here as evening draws on. . .
— Ted
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